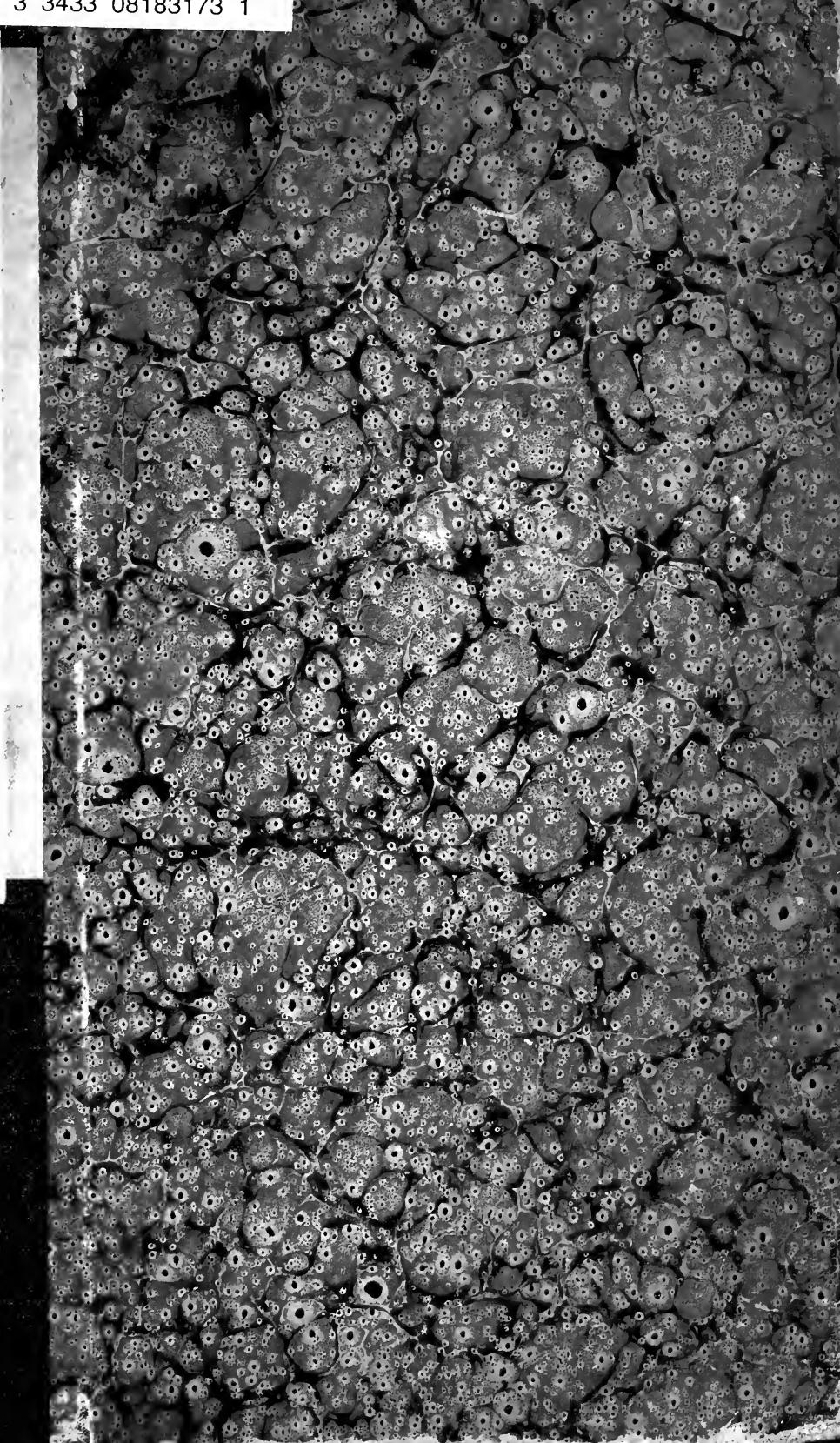
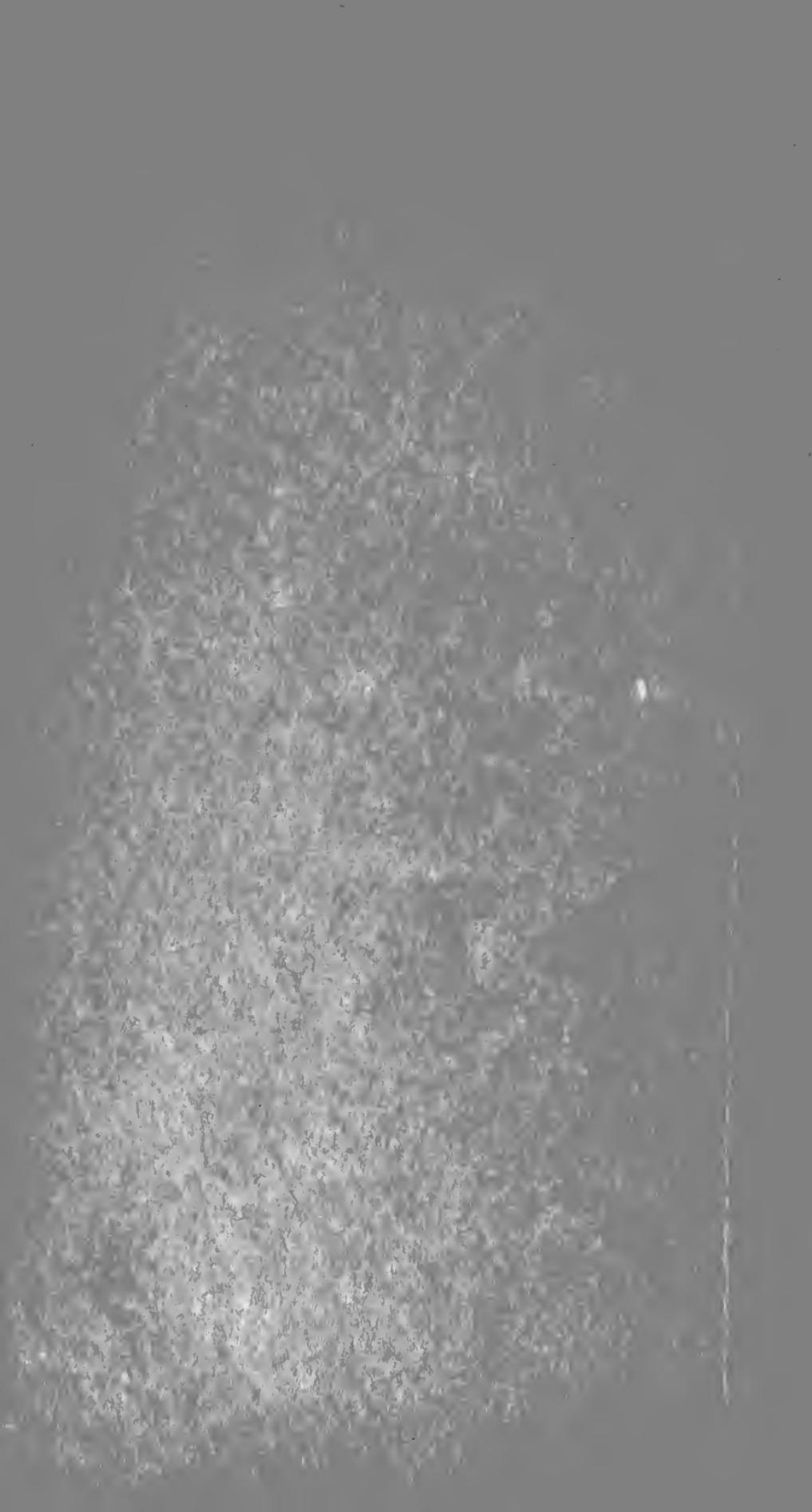


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THE
HISTORICAL DISCOURSE
GIVEN ON THE
FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE
BAPTIST CHURCH,

SOUTH ABINGTON, MASS.

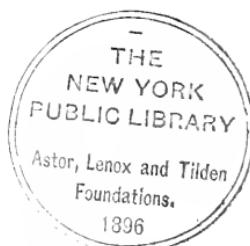
NOVEMBER 6th, 1872.

By CHAS. A. SNOW, Pastor.

WITH AN APPENDIX CONTAINING REPORT OF EXERCISES CONNECTED
WITH THE OCCASION.

[PUBLISHED BY THE CHURCH.]

SOUTH ABINGTON:
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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

IN

ABINGTON.

Our Savior has said that "the kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground ; and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." Mark IV : 26-29. This marvelous statement is signally confirmed by the history which we are now to review. The ripe fruits which have sprung from the seed of Divine truth are garnered in the histories of Christian churches that overspread the region around us. Old Plymouth County is rich in its record of sacred events. Among the early Pilgrims

appeared one whose name has since become linked with the history of Baptists in this country as their pioneer. Roger Williams settled in Plymouth about 1632, where he remained between two and three years. There is no doubt that he planted the seed of the baptist faith in this soil. As an evidence of the character of his teaching and of the influence it exerted, it is said that when he resigned his pastorate at Plymouth, a number of the church opposed his leaving, but "Elder Brewster prevailed with the church to grant his request, fearing he said that he would run the same course of rigid separation and Anabaptistry, which Mr. John Smith at Amsterdam had done," who, it appears, was at first a Brownist or Separatist, but afterwards was instrumental in gathering the First Baptist Church in Holland, of which he became pastor. It is apparent therefore that the germinal principle of the baptist faith took root in Plymouth in the very beginning of our history. Though remaining latent for a long period, it no doubt produced in time the fruits of strong and wide spread baptist sentiments now prevailing in this region. Obadiah Holmes, who was afterwards so unmercifully whipped at Boston, was first tried for his baptist principles before the General Court at Plymouth in 1650. But the religious atmosphere of the region would not tolerate the severity that was expressed by his persecutors, so that he was only nominally condemned. Rev. Henry Dunster, when driven from the presidency of Harvard College, on account of his baptist views, settled in Scituate in 1654, where he spent the remainder of his days. Charles Chauncy, who came to this country in 1638, preached in Plymouth and in Scituate several years until in 1654 he succeeded Dunster as president of Harvard College. He, too, was a believer in Gospel Baptism. Cotton Mather, speaking in reference to the growing tendency towards baptist principles styles it the "hydrophobia of Anabaptism." The leaven continued silently but surely to work. God raised up the men needed for the times, men of sound understanding, deep piety and dauntless courage. Such men were Peter Folger

and the Nelsons, and Elisha Callender, names embalmed in the baptist history of Plymouth County. Such a man was Isaac Backus, of blessed memory, whose labors are associated with the establishment of the baptist cause in this county upon a sound and permanent basis. Originally a Congregationlist, he was baptized in 1751 and became pastor in 1756 of the Baptist church formed that year in Titicut. That church was thenceforth known as the First Baptist Church in Middleboro', as it was also the first of this order in Plymouth County. The name of its pastor has become memorial. In labors abundant, in sacrifices many, through dire persecutions he pushed the work of the Lord so vigorously and so successfully, that his name has become venerated by Baptists throughout the country, and even across the seas.

We pass along in hasty review the history of the establishment of baptist churches in Plymouth County. In 1757 the Second Baptist Church in Middleboro' was formed, in the south part of the town in a place called Assowamsett, near Beach Woods. In 1761 the Third Church in Middleboro' was constituted with ten members, six of whom were dismissed from the First Church. In 1785 a baptist church was formed in the west part of Bridgewater. Sixteen persons were dismissed from the Titicut Church to unite in this enterprise. In 1788 the First Church of Marshfield was constituted. Of the persons who took part in this act, eleven were from the Third Middleboro' Church. Following the constitution of the Marshfield Church was that of Carver in 1791, of twelve persons, mostly from the Third Church in Middleboro'. Thus we find that before the close of the last century six baptist churches had been constituted in this county. The First Middleboro' was the parent church, and the other five, her descendants, were all happily settled within a short distance of the old homestead.

We thus give a brief sketch of these churches, not only because they are so closely related to each other in their origin and vital sympathies, but also because with them is

also connected, as a near relative in the same family, the church whose fiftieth anniversary we are to-day celebrating. This Church traces its lineage back to the same mother, now grey with years but green in the verdure of unfading goodness and strength. That church, as we have seen, gave birth to the Third Church in Middleboro'; the latter to the church in Marshfield. From the church in Marshfield came several persons who were prominent among the constituency of the church formed in 1822 in Abington. They brought with them, as their leader in the enterprise, their pastor, who was himself a loyal son of the old mother church, by whom he had been licensed to preach in 1809. A chain of circumstances like these cannot be merely accidental. It is one of those instances of the linking together of events that plainly show the working of the Divine hand, forging and uniting essential elements for carrying forward the mission of his word.

Having reached this point in our review, we now inquire into the more particular events which led to the formation of this church. In doing this we necessarily begin near the close of the last century. At that time the population of Abington was about sixteen hundred. There was then but one church in town. There had probably been no baptist preaching in this immediate vicinity. Nor can we learn that any person of the baptist faith had resided here. We read of one who, as early as 1782, was decoyed from Abington to Hingham, where he was set upon by a mob while preaching and driven from the town. But he, it appears, was only a "pilgrim" exhorter who had been on a visit to Scituate, and on his return homeward to Rhode Island, was only tarrying in Abington when prevailed upon to go back to Hingham. Though there had been no baptist preaching in the town, the truth had found a lodgment here. The name first associated with the baptist cause is that of Miss Anna Dunbar. Of her history we know but little, as it never has been published in any form. But a few aged persons, who well remember her, agree in the statement of facts relating

to her profession as a Baptist. Sometime before the close of the last century she removed from Hingham to this place and became a member of the Congregationalist Church at the Centre. Upon witnessing the administration of "Infant Baptism," she was led to a serious investigation of the ordinances of the Gospel, and the proper subjects of those ordinances. To her candid mind the truth revealed itself in great clearness. She accepted its teachings unaffected by tradition or human invention. She immediately made preparation to submit to baptism. There being no baptist minister whose services she could secure nearer than Taunton, she started on horse-back for that place. On arriving there she found the pastor of the church absent. She pressed on in her search until she found him in Dighton, twelve miles further away. On stating her errand, he returned with her to Taunton and called his church together to hear her Christian experience. Being approved by them she was immediately baptized by their pastor, Rev. William Nelson, and thence returned on her way rejoicing. The exact date of her baptism cannot be ascertained. But as it is well known that she was baptized by Mr. Nelson, the event must have taken place before the year 1786, when on account of severe sickness Mr. Nelson removed from Taunton. From the moment of her baptism sister Dunbar felt the internal witness of the spirit that she had truly followed the example of Christ. Though alone in her belief for many years, she faithfully maintained her position as a Baptist, until others embraced the same faith, and united with her in forming a baptist church. Sister Dunbar was a woman of strong feeling and quick impulses, but of an affectionate spirit and fervent piety. She died in 1841, at the ripe age of ninety-four, in the full assurance of faith.

Our record would be incomplete did we not refer to another who exerted considerable influence, we think, in preparing the way for the establishment of this church. Rev. James Davis, who was ordained in Vermont as an evangelist of the Congregationalist order in 1804, often preached in this town.

He is described as a man of eccentric manners, but of profound piety and of thorough faith in the Gospel as "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth." Cases of wonderful conversion marked his ministry. Conviction rooted itself so deeply in the hearts of his hearers that many, who came to his meetings in a careless and trifling mood, were heard on their way home exclaiming "We are lost! we are lost!" One man, on returning from a meeting, feared to ride his horse, lest the animal should stumble and plunge him into perdition. Several persons who were converted under his ministry afterwards united with this church. He himself became a Baptist in 1816, and from that time until his death was engaged in missionary and other labors in behalf of the denomination. "I really believe," he says, "I have been instrumental in the hands of God, of bringing into different churches of the baptist denomination eight hundred members." We must conclude that he had some influence, indirectly at least, in forming this church, for he continued to labor in this vicinity on occasional visits after he became a Baptist. We also find him associated in revival labors with Mr. Conant, even as early as 1810. He was the first to establish in this neighborhood that right arm of power in the Baptist church,—the social prayer meeting. Until the year 1814 such a meeting is said to have been unknown hereabouts. Mr. Davis died in Abington, in 1821, in a house that is still standing. There he preached his first sermon in town, and often afterwards found a home; and not far from its door his remains are now reposing.

We come now to speak of him who was mainly instrumental in gathering this church. Thomas Conant! a name enshrined in the hearts of all Baptists in the Old Colony, and even in regions beyond. With the history of many churches in eastern Massachusetts his name is identified. No one can read the life of this good man without devout thankfulness to God in raising him up and qualifying him for the arduous work committed to his hands. In faith, zeal, self-sacrifice, endurance, meekness, he was apostolic. His name appears

to-day above all others on the walls of this sanctuary, not by any invidious distinction, but as first in the order of that succession of reverend men whose labors have here been given to the cause of the Master. By invitation of Dea. J. C. Ransford (of whom we shall have occasion to speak more fully hereafter,) Mr. Conant came to Abington, in the spring of 1822, to baptize several persons. This interesting ceremony, that has proved so pregnant in good results, took place on Sunday April 7. The candidates were Robert Cook, Jonathan R. Gurney and Deborah Gurney, his wife. "These were the first individuals" Mr. Conant says, "who were ever immersed as far as I can learn, in the town of Abington." They became members, at the time of their baptism, of the church in Marshfield, of which Mr. Conant was then pastor. In consequence of this event and by the encouraging persuasions of Dea. Ransford, the forming of a church here was seriously contemplated. At that time the number of Baptist churches in Plymouth County had increased to eleven. Besides those already mentioned as having been formed before the close of the last century, were the following: The Fourth Middleboro' formed in 1800, Kingston in 1805, Hanover in 1806, Plymouth in 1809, and Pembroke and Hanson church in 1812. God had thus continued to prosper his cause in this region. The question which now began to be discussed by the brethren here, seemed to be the special unfolding of his providence. With this view of the case preliminary meetings were held at the house of Dea. Ransford, September 22nd and October 17th, to concert measures for organizing a church. According to arrangements then made, an ecclesiastical council met October 30th, to witness the constitution of a church and formally recognize it by appropriate religious services. The delegates were Rev. Thomas Baldwin, D. D., from Second Church in Boston, Rev. Daniel Sharp, from Third Church in Boston, Rev. John Butler, from Hanover Church, Rev. Thomas Conant, from Marshfield Church, Rev. Joseph Torrey, from Pembroke and Hanson Church. Rev. Dr. Baldwin was chosen moderator, Rev. J. Torrey, scribe. The following

persons, who were present, were invited to join the council, Rev. Joel Briggs, Dea. Heman Lincoln, Dea. Levi Farwell, Dea. William Eames and Ezra Chamberlain. The following record in the church book presents a brief account of the action taken on that occasion. "The brethren present wishing to unite together as a church read and adopted their articles of faith and practice, and solemnly covenanted together as a church of our Lord Jesus Christ, much to the satisfaction of the council. Whereupon the council resolved unanimously publicly to recognize them this afternoon as a sister church of our Lord Jesus Christ, by the name of the First Baptist Church of Christ in Abington." The prayers of Anna Dunbar were answered. For forty years her faith had been severely tried, and then God crowned her faith with the blessing she had patiently sought. The names of the persons who thus united in church covenant are: Josiah C. Ransford and Sarah Ransford, dismissed from the Second Baptist Church in Boston, Robert Cook, Jonathan R. Gurney and Deborah Gurney, from the Baptist Church in Marshfield, Nathan Alden, from the Baptist Church West Bridgewater, Thaxter Reed and Molly Gurney, from the Baptist Church in Hanson, William Packard, from the Baptist Church in Stoughton, Mary Hobart, from the Baptist Church in Plymouth, and Anna Dunbar. Of this number three still remain to celebrate this Fiftieth Anniversary. They are Dea. Robert Cook, Dea. J. R. Gurney, and Deborah Gurney, who were the first baptized converts in the town. But they have now reached the margin of the river and will soon cross the flood.

The church was publicly recognized in the afternoon of the same day by the following order of exercises: Prayer by Rev. John Butler; sermon by Rev. Daniel Sharp, from Psalm CXXXIII : 1,—"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." Consecrating prayer by Rev. Dr. Baldwin; hand of fellowship to Dea. Ransford, who received it in behalf of the church, by Rev. Joseph Torrey; concluding prayer by Rev. Joel Briggs.

These services were held in a house which had already been erected for the use of the church, and which had been dedicated to the worship of God, in the forenoon of the same day. Dr. Baldwin preached the Dedication Sermon from Gen. XXVIII : 17. "This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." The house was situated on the site occupied by the present one, the land having been purchased of Levi Shaw for thirty dollars. It measured twenty-seven by twenty-four feet on the ground and contained thirty-six pews, capable of seating two hundred persons. It cost about one thousand dollars, and was secured by the untiring exertions of Dea. Ransford, who largely met the expense by his own munificent liberality. Dea. Ransford was the committee and Ebenezer Porter the builder.

At the time this church was formed and, indeed, for many years before, evangelical churches in this region throughout a wide extent had greatly degenerated. The truth had become infected with the leaven of Unitarianism. Several churches had become so divided in their membership into "liberals" and "conservatives" that it was difficult to determine their denominational status. The soul-searching truths of the gospel were held in abeyance on account of strong opposition existing against them. Piety therefore greatly declined. Several churches actually lapsed into avowed Unitarianism. From others the conservative class withdrew and formed churches distinctively orthodox. Under circumstances like these this church began its career, not only having to combat the growing heresy of Unitarianism, but also to meet as Baptists the stern opposition of those who observed the ordinances of the Gospel after the tradition of men.

May 2, 1823, Rev. Thomas Conant was unanimously invited to become the first pastor of this church, at a salary of one hundred and fifty dollars. He accepted the invitation so far as to devote one-half his time for a year to pastoral labor, though he was not formally inducted into the office of pastor nor did he join the church here. It is to be regretted

that almost no records were kept by the church during this year. It was the most eventful year of their history. Their enterprise was a bold venture and they realized the experiences of detraction and persecution for Christ's sake. From the day of the first baptism the spirit of opposition to the baptist faith, and especially to the design of forming a baptist church had, as already intimated, fully revealed itself. Mr. Conant seems to have been the special sufferer from this hostility. His children were harrassed on the streets and his family disturbed at night by the howlings of an impious rabble. His horse was sheared and otherwise maltreated. A member of the school committee refused to examine him as a candidate to teach a town school "solely on the ground of (his) principles as a Baptist." Afterwards, when approved by another member, an effort to break up his school "had its origin in the same spirit of dislike to the peculiar views of the Baptists." In spite, however, of all this the cause of truth prevailed. The trials of the church and of their brave leader doubtless resulted in the furtherance of the Gospel. Mr. Conant says "one of those who sheared my horse, finally became a member of the Baptist Church and acknowledged that he did the deed." We may be justified in adding here that from this time onward the church enjoyed a steady and in some respects a wonderful growth, commanding itself to general confidence and esteem and reaching in time a high position for piety, intelligence and influence.

Sept. 17, 1823, the church united with the Boston Association whose sessions were held that year in Salem. It reported a membership of twenty-four, and sent as delegates Rev. Thomas Conant and Dea. J. C. Ransford. Dea. Ransford was chosen as deacon of this church Nov. 24. He had previously held the office for a number of years in the Second Baptist Church in Boston.

During the year of Mr. Conant's ministry he baptized fourteen persons and left a membership of twenty-six. The solicitude and care of the church for the spiritual welfare of its members is evidenced by the system of general visitation

adopted March 6, 1824. The church was divided into classes or sections and given in charge to different brethren who should exercise a watchful care over them and seek to foster a general spirit of brotherly love and Christian fidelity. Their success in this labor is a fact of note-worthy record.

From this point we pass somewhat rapidly along the line of our history, bringing into review the more prominent facts without pausing for the special inspection of any except such as may seem of vital importance. The notice of each pastoral epoch in a somewhat condensed form will meet the necessities of the present service. May 9, 1824, Willard Kimball was unanimously invited to become pastor. He was ordained June 30, by the following order of services: Prayer by Rev. Thomas Conant; sermon by Rev. Daniel Sharp; ordaining prayer by Rev. B. C. Grafton; charge by Rev. Dr. Baldwin; hand of fellowship by Rev. E. Nelson, Jr.; address to the church by Rev. Benjamin Putnam; concluding prayer by Rev. Joel Briggs. Dr. Baldwin was moderator of the council and E. Nelson, Jr., clerk.

Nov. 4, 1824, J. R. Gurney was chosen deacon. Under date of Dec. 5, 1825, occurs the following interesting record: "Dea. J. C. Ransford made over to the church in their representative, Dea. J. R. Gurney, all the right he had in the First Baptist meeting-house in Abington, together with what he had received from various individuals in Boston and elsewhere in aid of building said house, amounting in all to \$701.05, the proceeds of which are to be applied to the support of preaching." The following is a copy of the deed:

KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS:

That I. Josiah Collins Ransford, of Abington, in the County of Plymouth and Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Gentleman, having received donations from sundry persons to aid in building the First Baptist Meeting-house in Abington, aforesaid amounting to four hundred and thirty-six dollars and sixty-six cents, and also having received from rent of pews up to April first, eighteen hundred and twenty-six,

the amount of one hundred and thirteen dollars and thirty-four cents, making in the whole five hundred and fifty dollars being invested in said Meeting-house and land thereto belonging, which proportion I do by these presents quitclaim for myself and heirs forever, as also I give the balance due me from said house, amounting to one hundred and fifty-one dollars and five cents which is seven-twelfths of said house. All the above I do for myself and my heirs quitclaim and deliver to Jonathan R. Gurney, deacon of the First Baptist Church in Abington, and his successors in office, (with this reserve, the use of the pew I now occupy while I live in Abington,) for the following purpose. This proportion of the house must not be sold nor any part, but rented, the rent to go towards supporting the Gospel preaching in said House. In witness whereof, I, the said Josiah Collins Ransford, and Sarah my wife, in testimony of her relinquishing her right of dower in said relinquished property, have hereunto set our hands and seals this first day of December, in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and twenty-five.

J. C. RANSFORD,

{
SEAL
}

SARAH RANSFORD.

{
SEAL
}

Signed, sealed and delivered in presence of us,

SARAH A. RANSFORD,

JARED WHITMAN.

Sworn before JARED WHITMAN, *Justice of Peace.*

The church showed its grateful appreciation of this act in the following record (made May 6, 1826) :

“Voted that this church have a grateful sense of the goodness of God in raising them up such a friend in their low and afflicted estate as Dea. Josiah C. Ransford, who, in the midst of a people of deep rooted prejudice, has exerted himself in building us up and has been instrumental in procuring us a convenient house for public worship, together with many other acts of benevolence.”

Also voted that Dea J. C. Ransford present our sincere and hearty thanks to the Second Baptist Church in Boston,

for the donations which he received to strengthen in building a house for public worship."

Mr. Kimball closed his pastoral relation about the first of May, 1826. Ten had been received into the church, five of whom had been baptized. The church now numbered thirty-five.

Rev. Davis Curtis was installed as pastor by a council that met July 26, 1826, the services of the occasion presenting the somewhat anomalous feature of the candidate preaching his own installation sermon. The other ministers who took part in the exercises were Orin Tracy, Joel Briggs and Thomas Conant. Mr. Curtis remained with the church a little more than two years. It was a period of considerable trial and anxiety. Signs of declension had already appeared, and it was found necessary to exercise stringent discipline with several persons, some of whom were guilty of grievous offenses. In taking this action the church seems to have been very prompt and decided. Regard was had for the moral healthfulness of the body and for its social standing and influence. The means of grace, especially the ordinances of the church, being neglected by some, it was thought necessary to enact the rule (May 3, 1828,) that "if members absent themselves more than three months from the Communion and church meetings, the pastor or a committee shall visit and inform them that the church is grieved with them, and will deal with them, unless they manifest immediate repentance and reformation." A better state of things ensued. The discipline of the body quickened its vitality. October 6, 1827, the first "Standing Committee" was chosen, whose duty, as defined in the record, was "to mature business for the church." Their names are Dea. J. C. Ransford, Dea. J. R. Gurney, Bela Dyer, C. Benson, and Robert Cook. In September, 1828, the church communicated as usual with the Boston Association, and then withdrew from that body to connect itself with the Old Colony Association, which met the following month in Brewster. It is still a member of the latter body and has never

failed to make its annual report. During the pastorate of Mr. Curtis, ten united with the church, eight of them by baptism. The withdrawal of Mr. Curtis seems to have been abrupt, and was caused, we learn, by strong masonic excitement which prevailed at that time. The church remained destitute of a pastor nearly two years. However, though still small and weak, it was kept together in fellowship and love. The letter to the Association in 1829 says: "Though this church is destitute of a pastor, yet there never was a time when it was more harmonious in doctrine, affection and practices."

Rev. Silas Hall became third pastor of the church Aug. 21, 1830. Events of much interest and importance to the church happened during his stay. It was a period of general prosperity, though not without alternations of light and darkness. A heavy cloud swept over the community May 22, 1832, when it was announced that Dea. J. C. Ransford had passed away from earth. For ten years he had labored in the Baptist cause here, carefully fostering the infant church which he had been so instrumental in forming. He was wise in council and efficient in service, "a good man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost." The church had leaned heavily on him and now keenly felt his loss. A "tower of strength" was gone from their midst. He left no posterity here to preserve his name and to honor his memory. But his name is enshrined in the annals of this church, which will ever continue to be the best memorial of his fidelity and worth as a servant of the Lord Jesus. Our Heavenly Father never calls away his faithful servants out of season. In his infinite wisdom he perfectly adjusts all the events of his kingdom, so as to work out the good pleasure of his will. Therefore in calling this good man to his rest, though sorely bereaving his people, he soon filled the sad vacancy. He raised up others who became strong men in the church. During the Spring of 1832 a precious revival of religion prevailed, the first of a general character the church had ever enjoyed. The truth took hold of hearts that had persistently withheld its power for years. The

entire village was moved. Nearly every house was visited by the Spirit. Many remarkable conversions occurred. Strong men were slain by the Law and delivered by the Gospel. The foundations of the church were strengthened and its power for good greatly enlarged. As a result of this work of grace, twenty-five persons were baptized and received into the church. Some of them have won the crown, after devoted and long service for the Master, among whom appear the venerated names of Samuel Norton, Samuel Porter, and Mehitable Wilkes. Others remain until this day patient and faithful toilers in the vineyard.

The meeting house being now too small to accommodate the increasing congregation, it was sold and another erected in its place. In the meantime meetings on Sunday were held in the house of widow Ransford, by her invitation. The new house measured 41x45 feet, and contained 58 pews, having a seating capacity for about 300 persons. It cost \$3000. Luke Nash and Sherebiah Corthell, were the building committee. It was dedicated Jan. 1, 1833, the pastor preaching the sermon. Although the church was far from being wealthy, the entire expense of this enterprise was met without pecuniary aid from the community at large. The prospects of the church were very encouraging. A happy union prevailed and the converts of the late revival continued to inspire confidence and cheer. Signal blessings attended the labors of the pastor. The current of events was not unvaryingly smooth and agreeable, yet showed nevertheless a continual advance in both material and spiritual growth. Sound teaching, thorough discipline and promptitude in all things, were features of the church's life at this time. Mr. Hall closed his labors as pastor October 29, 1834, having received to the fellowship of the church thirty-five. The membership about doubled during his pastorate.

From this time until the spring of 1835, nothing occurred of special interest. The pulpit was regularly supplied either by Mr. Hall or by students from the Theological Seminary at Newton. On the first Sunday in February, Mr. W. H.

Dalrymple, then a student at Newton, preached with such acceptance that his services, as stated supply, were secured until the first of April following, when he was unanimously called to the pastorate. Having accepted the call he was ordained April 29. Sermon and charge by Rev. Isaac Smith; ordaining prayer and hand of fellowship by Rev. John Allen. A protracted meeting was commenced Feb 9, and continued nine days, during which the pastor was assisted in preaching and other labors by Rev. Hervey Fitts, at that time pastor of the Central Middleboro' church. As a result of this effort "ten or twelve gave evidence of a change of heart." Others who had for some time indulged hope were revived and took a more decided and active part with the followers of Christ. Special means were taken at this time to promote the spirit of general benevolence. A constitution was prepared and a society duly organized for this purpose. Oct. 5th and 6th, 1836, the church entertained the Old Colony Association for the first time. When we recall the fact that the Association embraced a wider territory and was larger in numbers then than now, comprising nineteen churches with one thousand five hundred and thirty-eight members, to thirteen churches at present and a membership of one thousand three hundred and eighty-four, it must be seen that it was no easy matter for a small, untried church to entertain such a body for the first time. At that day we presume greater numbers attended the association and remained through the meetings than at the present time. Yet the church made abundant provision and were only prevented from exercising their full hospitalities by a severe storm which detained many delegates from the meetings. It was, however, an occasion of much interest and profit. Since then the association has occasionally met here and will again be welcomed for the sixth time next fall.

Mr. Dalrymple presented his resignation March 19, 1837, and closed his labors the same day, the church acceding to his request for personal accommodation in this respect. During his pastorate he had baptized fifteen and given the

hand of church fellowship to twenty-one. Brethren Dalrymple and Hall are the only pastors of the first six who are still living, and by the favor of God they are both present with us to-day.

Rev. Edward C. Messinger succeeded Mr. Dalrymple in May, 1837. His term of service continued eight years, the longest of any pastor this church has ever had. The first few years passed without special incidents, except in the exercise of disciplinary measures with some who had once been prominent in the church but had become estranged through various causes. The continuance of this pastorate for so many years contributed much to ensure the union and harmony and general prosperity which existed during the time. It was a period of critical issues, when discreetness of judgment and meekness of spirit were especially required. Questions of exciting interest arose that greatly moved the Christian community everywhere in the land, and even imperilled the existence of many churches. But though this church felt the upheavals which the discussion of these questions produced, she was enabled to maintain her equipoise. By prudent forethought and careful direction of affairs she passed through the ordeal unshorn of her comeliness or strength. The special causes of agitation at this time were Millerism and slavery. From the first of these the church seems to have suffered comparatively little, though a few persons became tainted with the doctrine. But the question concerning the attitude the church should take on the matter of slavery, provoked a long and vexatious dispute. It was at a time, it will be remembered, when strong influences were being used to press the churches of the North to take an ultra position against this gigantic social wrong. Conflicts were often fiercer within the churches than without. Persons of extreme views and impetuous spirit became hostile to the churches with which they were connected, if those churches declined or hesitated to adopt the radical measures they proposed. Churches suffered from public censure, and insidious efforts were made to effect

their destruction. Long and painful as was the trial in this church it resulted in the exclusion of only one member. Looking back upon that exciting agitation, and calmly viewing all the circumstances connected with it, we may well judge that the fierce collision of parties in the churches arose, in many instances, from mutual misunderstanding. We are led to believe that such was the fact in this case. Immediately after quiet had been restored, the church passed the two following votes, which clearly indicate its real spirit at the time, and seem sufficiently precise to suit the straitest of the sect of radicals; (Dec. 13, 1841), "Voted, that we recommend to the Baptist Society to debar slave-holders and traffickers from the pulpit." "Voted, that we debar slave-holders and traffickers from the communion."

The favor of God was signally displayed in preserving the general harmony of his people during this period of trial, and in keeping from His church the ruin that threatened it. "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever." Psalm CXXV : 2.

"Zion stands with hills surrounded
Zion, kept by power divine ;
All her foes shall be confounded,
Though the world in arms combine.

In the furnace God may prove thee,
Thence to bring thee forth more bright,
But can never cease to love thee ;
Thou art precious in his sight."

Almost immediately following this time of darkness and anxiety was one of the most precious revivals this church has ever enjoyed. Ten years had passed since the revival under the ministry of Mr. Hall. Only twenty-four persons had been received by baptism during these intervening years. But now a serious and solemn spirit began to extend through the church and community. About the tenth of February, 1842, a series of meetings was commenced which

were held almost daily for six weeks. Crowds of people flocked to the house of God. Sinners were converted, backsliders reclaimed and gainsayers silenced by the demonstration of the Spirit. The principal means employed in promoting the work of God were the simple preaching of the Gospel, religious conversation and prayer. Baptisms took place for five successive months and thirty-one persons were thus received into the church. Several of them are still dwelling among us and are faithfully walking in the commandments and ordinances of the Gospel. Mr. Messenger completed his pastorate Aug. 17, 1845. Fifty-nine had been received into fellowship, forty-three of them by baptism.

For several months the pulpit was supplied by different ministers. It appears, however, that the peace of the church was somewhat disturbed for a time by a partisan spirit. But this spirit soon yielded to wise counsels and to the interest that was awakened in the preaching of Mr. William F. Stubbert, whose visits to the people as a supply seemed to be providential. April 16, 1846, Mr. Stubbert was unanimously invited to become pastor. He accepted the call, and after being ordained at Jamaica Plain began here his first pastorate, which continued through five years of great harmony, and was blessed in the unprecedented growth of the church. His coming was indeed like the coming of Titus, for he "comforted" the hearts of the brethren. In the fall of this year the old meeting house was torn down and a new one erected in its stead. It measured seventy-two by forty-eight feet, contained eighty pews and cost about \$6,000. O. G. Healy was the builder and Davis Gurney was the chairman of the building committee, which numbered nine persons. The church in the meanwhile worshipped on the Sabbath, for about five months, with the Congregationalist Society by their very courteous invitation. The new meeting house was dedicated Jan. 13, 1847, in the forenoon. Rev. Dr. Sharp preached the sermon on this occasion. In the afternoon of the same day

formal services were held in the installation of Rev. Mr. Stubbert. Rev. Dr. Choules, of Jamaica Plain, preached the sermon. The services of the day are described as having been "very solemn and interesting." Sunday, April 4, was a day of special and deep interest. It was observed as the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first baptism in Abington, and was appropriately signalized by the baptism of two persons, Mr. William Cox and Phebe Cox, his wife.

During the pastorate of Mr. Stubbert two very interesting revivals were enjoyed. The first commenced early in the spring of 1848 and continued for several months. Sixteen were baptized. The second began in the fall of 1849, and extended far into the following year. At the annual fast held Jan. 7, 1850, so marked was the evidence of the Spirit's presence that meetings were appointed for the afternoon and evening of the following day. Another day of fasting and prayer was held on the 15th. The feeling grew deeper and more wide-spread. The church became thoroughly interested in the work, and sinners were converted in scores. Baptisms took place every month from February to June inclusive, during which time ninety-five persons professed their faith in Christ and united with this church. It was a marvelous display of divine power. God beautified the place of His sanctuary and made the place of His feet glorious. On a single occasion fifty-two persons received the hand of church fellowship, among whom were sixteen members of the choir who had marched down from their seats in the gallery led by the organist. The letter to the Association that year states: "The past year, in the history of this church, will long be remembered, a year full of blessings and rich with the manifestations of sovereign grace. Christians were awakened, and sinners aroused, until the church were astonished and trembled in beholding the work of God." The results in promoting the general spirit of religion were very gratifying. "The benevolent operations of the church received a fresh impulse. Two new missionary societies were formed, which contributed generously to various benev-

olent objects." One of these—the Young People's Missionary Society—supported a Colporter in the West, for a number of years. The other—the Ladies' Cutter Missionary Society—educated an Assamese child in Mrs. Cutter's school at Gowahatti. In honor of the President of the society, this child received the name of Mary Stubbert. It is a note-worthy fact that special pains were taken at this time both to indoctrinate the converts in the teachings of the Gospel and to encourage them in their proper walk as members of a Christian church. The lambs of the fold were not neglected while the sheep should content themselves with merely browsing. The following preamble and resolutions passed Aug. 19, 1850, indicate this spirit of watch-care and solicitude :

"Believing as we do that the church is the body of Christ and we, its members, cannot forsake the regular meetings of the church without wounding the cause and bringing darkness on our own minds, therefore :

Resolved, That if any brother or sister shall absent themselves from prayer meetings, church conference and communion, two successive months, we will visit him or her as a friend and brother and inquire their reason for so doing.

Resolved, That we try to eradicate everything that will retard the advancement of the cause of Christ and the union and happiness of the church."

Thus anxious were the older members to aid the younger to maintain their discipleship, and so to train them that they should be "lively stones" in the spiritual temple. The church gained stability and power. Harmony, brotherly love and consecration to Christ were most manifest. The era of good feeling and progress continued. Mr. Stubbert closed his labors as pastor in March, 1851. He had received into the church by baptism, 127; by letter, 25; by restoration, 3; total, 155. On his assuming the pastorate the church numbered one hundred and twelve. He left it with a membership of two hundred and forty-two.

We have somewhat cursorily viewed the history of this

church in its earlier years, embracing the longest pastorates. Our further survey must necessarily be still more rapid. The frequent pastoral changes which have since ensued, render it neither desirable nor profitable to sketch in detail the remaining history. Nor are there in the later years many very prominent events demanding special notice.

During the past twenty years the church has had the questionable felicity of welcoming eight to the pastoral office. It has enjoyed the blessings, and perhaps also some of the discomforts of an itinerant ministry.

Mr. Stubbert was succeeded by Rev. Nathaniel Colver, who became pastor April 1, 1852, and served the church one year. Declining several calls to labor in other fields, he accepted the invitation of this church from a deep conviction that hither the Lord had directed his steps. He brought with him the fruits of a large experience. His sympathies were broad and earnest. In his comprehensive mind he took in the great field for christian toil which God had spread before the church here. His first and special aim therefore was to search out the ministerial gifts among his brethren and bring them into use. In the months of September and October he delivered a series of discourses, which greatly awakened the interest of the church in this matter. The result was that three members were approved as suitable candidates for the ministry. All of them engaged in preaching as occasions presented themselves. Two of the number have since received ordination, Leander P. Gurney and Noah Fullerton, and are at present pastors of churches. The name of Nathaniel Colver is held in high esteem by this church, not only because he was once their pastor, but also for his noble self sacrifice since in behalf of Freedmen, a class in whose elevation the sympathies of this people are warmly enlisted. During his pastorate Mr. Colver baptized 13 and received 22 to membership.

Rev. Horace T. Love became pastor Nov. 1, 1853, and remained until April 30, 1854. Fifteen were added to the church, nine of them by baptism. Mr. Love left to take the

pastoral oversight of a church about to be formed in the east part of the town. Fourteen others were dismissed at the same time to unite with him in this enterprise.

Rev. F. A. Willard was the next pastor. He began labor Nov. 4, 1854, and continued in office here one year and three months. Nine were added to the church.

The pulpit was supplied for a time by Rev. Mr. Conant (who on account of his age, and his loving regard and care for this church had come to be known and venerated as "Father" Conant), and by students from the Seminary at Newton. The vacancy in the pastorate had produced depressing consequences to the church. A vote was passed that the house of worship be closed. But a few brethren who could not endure such an event, apprehending from it the most disastrous results, were permitted to maintain public worship by becoming personally responsible for the expense. It was by their invitation that Father Conant came to the aid of the church with his wise counsels and words of cheer. His timely services were happily supplemented by the faithful labors of Mr. J. Colver Wightman, then a student at Newton. By clear and forcible presentations of truth, the way was prepared for the precious work of grace which soon ensued. Jan. 13, 1857, Rev. A. B. Earle, the evangelist, commenced a series of meetings, which were continued daily for more than five weeks. The church were awakened into a new interest, and many persons professed conversion. Mr. Earle baptized twenty-four as a partial result of this work. April 14, a council ordained Mr. Wightman, who had accepted a call from the church. Rev. J. W. Parker, D. D. of Newton, preached the sermon. During this year extensive repairs were made on the house of worship. The vestry was a low, dark, subterranean room, sepulchrally damp, mouldy and odorous, wholly unfit for the occupancy of a Christian people who were not called to martyrdom by any existing crisis in the affairs of Christ's kingdom. Sometimes the water rose above the floor and even reached the seats, but as it never attained the depth sufficient to meet the requirements of a baptistry, it was found

necessary to drain it off that the vestry might be made suitable for other uses. The following amusing record appears on the parish book as early as Sept. 18, 1854: "Voted, to put up at auction the draining of the water out of the vestry, the bidder to warrant a dry vestry until next April or no pay." The determination evinced in this expression is commendable. Tolerably safe quarters were thus prepared for the social gatherings of the church. Still it was found advisable to raise the house so that all its apartments might stand above ground, and thereby insure the worshipper against the liability of serving in the spirit while guilty of transgressing in the letter. An effort was therefore made, in which the pastor seems to have been the leading spirit, which resulted in giving us the present, comfortable and cheery room for the use of the Sunday school and social meetings. The expense of the work amounted to about \$4,000. The pastorate of Mr. Wightman was interrupted by severe illness and was finally resigned May 16, 1858. Nineteen had been received into the church by baptism up to this date and six had been restored. During the sickness of the pastor his place was acceptably supplied most of the time by Rev. J. A Goodhue.

The church remained without a pastor two years and seven months, though favored with the excellent labors of Rev. Charles K. Colver for about nine months of that time. Nov. 18, 1860, a unanimous call was given to Rev. N. Judson Clark and accepted. Mr. Clark began his work as pastor Dec. 11, 1860. In the following spring God once more poured out his Spirit upon the place. It was an occasion of gratefulness and of encouragement, for the church had been much depressed and the religious spirit had run low during the long interval of trial and uncertainty which had elapsed since the close of the former pastorate. Fraternal ties had become broken. It seemed to some that God had hidden his face, and that the church would not soon resume its state of former harmony. But God heard the prayers of the faithful and came to them in the fulness of his love. In the four months from March to June, forty persons were baptized,

and the general tone of christian enterprise in the church was thereby much improved. Mr. Clark remained with the church until June 22, 1863. Forty-five had been received by baptism, twenty by letter, and one by experience.

Rev. George R. Darrow succeeded to the pastorate April 3, 1864. Several incidents of much interest occurred during his administration. The church became specially quickened in the beginning of 1865. Daily meetings were held, morning and evening, for nearly four months. The pastor was assisted in his work by Rev. Curtis Keeney, an evangelist from Connecticut. More than one hundred persons professed hope in Christ. Sixty-three joined the church by baptism during the spring and summer. At the covenant meeting in April the attendance exceeded one hundred, the largest meeting of the kind ever held by the church. On one occasion previous to this, during the revival under Mr. Stubbert's ministry, eighty were present at a covenant meeting. May 31, 1867, the first "Annual Covenant Meeting" was held. This was a new and interesting event and has since been regularly observed. The occasion consists of the usual religious services, together with the reading of letters from absent members and the presentation of free will offerings to the Lord's treasury for the use of the church. It has proved to be a meeting of great interest and much material profit. The amount found in the treasury at the close of the first meeting was \$180. 60. Last year (1871) it reached \$204.00. June 9, 1867, a cordial invitation was extended to the Congregational society to unite with this church in public worship, during the time they should be engaged in repairing their meeting-house, thus seeking to reciprocate their kindness on a former similar occasion. The invitation was accepted and the two societies worshipped together harmoniously and pleasantly for nine months. Mr. Darrow was constrained to close his relations with the church Dec. 31, 1867, on account of severe illness in his family. Seventy seven had been baptized, twelve received by letter, three by experience, and eight were restored.

Rev. James E. Wilson became pastor Oct. 1, 1868, and remained until Dec. 5, 1869. Seven were received to membership. Like all his predecessors in office Mr. Wilson gave to the service of the church the fruits of broad culture and personal devotion to the Master. But after diligent labor for a few months he felt that the providence of God called him to another field. Many as the pastoral changes have been in the history of this church, it is a matter for grateful mention that not one of them has been caused by any defamation of the office on the part of him who has held it. Each one has earned a good degree as a devoted minister of Jesus Christ. Some have been regarded as men of more than ordinary ability, and have been honored for their scholarship and for their executive talent in the administration of affairs in Christ's kingdom.

The present pastor of the church entered upon his duties Nov. 1, 1870. On Mar. 19, 1871, the last service was held in the main audience room of the meeting-house, previous to making extensive alterations and repairs. Work was begun the following morning and carried on with such despatch that it was completed in less than eleven weeks. The old seats were refitted and upholstered, new windows put in, new pulpit and platform built and furnished, floor recarpeted, the walls and ceilings frescoed, and the house repainted throughout. The work was done at a cost of nearly \$3000.00 and was paid for when finished. Appropriate re-opening services were held on Sunday June 4. In Oct. 1871, the church enjoyed the pleasure of entertaining the Baptist State Anniversaries. About three hundred and fifty delegates and other visitors were cordially provided for during the continuance of the meetings. In the fall of this year a Woman's Missionary Society was formed to lend a helping hand in the work contemplated by the General Society bearing this name. One hundred dollars are contributed annually to the treasury of the parent society.

The church has always succeeded in meeting its pecuniary obligations. The current expenses of supporting the gospel

have been met generally by voluntary subscriptions, though occasionally by an assessment of the members in proportion to their property. But the voluntary system has commended itself most strongly to the judgment of the church, as both theoretically and practically the best. Whenever a difference of opinion has prevailed and other means have been employed they have usually failed and have even caused distraction and alienation. On the first Sunday in April, 1870, the pews in the meeting-house were opened free to the public, by vote of the Parish passed Mar. 26. Although this step was taken with no little misgiving on the part of some, the result has since justified the wisdom of the arrangement. The annual expenses, now larger by several hundred dollars than ever before, were never more easily met than since the adoption of the free seat system.

In the benevolent operations of the day the church has largely participated, both in pecuniary contributions and in practical cooperation. As it has freely received, so it has freely given. While seeking to enlarge the sphere of its usefulness abroad, it has had a generous care for the interests of its home work. From a very early period to the present time a Church Poor Fund has been maintained, amply supplying the wants of its occasional beneficiaries. As often as it has liberally devised it has been liberally enriched. Could the record of contributions be known it would doubtless present a very gratifying aggregate. The reformatory movements of the age also have received hearty sympathy and material support. The church has long been identified with the interests of temperance, education and human freedom. Eleven of its number have been approved as candidates for the christian ministry, viz: Edward C. Mitchell, Leander P. Gurney, John Sproul, Noah Fullerton, George A. Litchfield, Elmer L. Corthell, James McKeen, James H. Earle, Bela Dyer, George L. Ruberg and Preston Gurney. Four of them—L. P. Gurney, N. Fullerton, G. L. Ruberg and P. Gurney—are in active service as pastors at the present time, and one, E. C. Mitchell, is a Professor in Chicago University.

The church has had seven deacons, viz : J. C. Ransford, J. R. Gurney, Robert Cook, Samuel Norton, Noah Fullerton, D. Brainard Gurney and James L. Cortell. The last two are still in office.

Fifteen persons have served as clerks in the following order : Willard Kimball, David Curtis, J. C. Ransford, Silas Hall, Samuel Norton, W. H. Dahrymple, E. C. Messinger, L. P. Gurney, Edwin Gurney, William D. Wade, George A. Reed, Francis Millett, William H. Reed, Elbridge G. Sharp and James L. Cortell.

The whole number connected with the church in the past fifty years is five hundred and ninety-eight ; the number baptized is four hundred and forty. There have been dismissed to other churches one hundred and sixty-three, and eighty-two have died. The present membership is two hundred and fifty-one. It will be seen that the church is only a little larger to-day than it was twenty-one years ago. We may explain this in part by the fact that, of the number who have been dismissed to other churches, seven-eighths, or one hundred and forty, have been dismissed in the last twenty-one years. Some of them united in forming the East Abington church ; many of them have followed the popular current towards our largest business centres. Thus this church, like every other in the interior sections of the country, has contributed towards the thrift and strength of churches in our larger towns and cities.

Beloved brethren and friends, we have thus turned the cycle of our history. The views presented to us have been like those of a kaleidoscope, constantly changing, presenting combinations and colorings sometimes fascinating, on which the eye would love to linger long, and then in a single movement revealing a picture far less engaging. Yet all the scenes that have come into view have some margins and lines of attractive coloring to cheer our faith. Fifty years is a great period for any people. They work wondrous changes. The living present is before us to-day ; but the dead past also lives again and appears to our vision in vivid form.

Many who have departed from earth seem to meet with us again to-day. They come down from their shining seats. They pass before us "in bright array." Their voices seem to touch our ears with their familiar intonations. The revered Conant leads the train. Five of the fourteen pastors accompany him, Kimball and Curtis, Messinger and Colver and Willard. Following them are Deas, Ransford and Norton, "Father" Porter and "Mother" Reed and brethren Ephraim and David Gurney, Ezra and Nathan Alden, and sisters Dunbar, Wilks and Sharp. And still others are following on whom time fails us to mention. Can you hear their foot-falls? Do you feel their presence here? Is there indeed a communion of saints that sanctifies this occasion? Ere fifty years more are gone we may all meet them face to face where we shall see the glory of the Lord. May this occasion serve to inspire in us greater zeal for the present toil and stronger hope for the future crown.



Semi-Centennial Celebration.

The following brief report which appeared in the *Boston Journal* of Nov. 7, 1872, gives a sufficiently full account of the main features and incidents of the occasion.

Fifty Years of Christian Work.

The history of the Baptist denomination in this State as well as in this country dates back to the days of Roger Williams and the Plymouth Bay Colony. The early growth of the churches in the historic County of Plymouth is full of interest, and their early struggles and triumphs show a devotion to precept and principle which the descendants in later days have most faithfully maintained. The Baptist Church in South Abington has now passed the fiftieth anniversary of its organization, and exhibits a clean record of faithful, harmonious and efficient Christian work; a record which should inspire the present members with self-sacrificing devotion and earnest work in the spread of Gospel truth. In order to glance over the past the members of the church celebrated the event in an appropriate manner yesterday. The church was organized October 30, 1822, but the celebration was not held on that day for the reason that the State Baptist Anniversaries were then being held, consequently the exercises were postponed until yesterday.

The neatly frescoed and pleasant audience room where the exercises were held was rendered unusually attractive by the most beautiful and artistic decoration of the pulpit and surroundings with gracefully twining evergreens and bright colored, odorous flowers. A cross of buds and blossoms, springing from a floral bank and surrounded by bouquets, occupied the altar in front of the pulpit, and vases of flowers and clinging vines were ranged along the entire pulpit front. The recess in the rear of the pulpit was bordered with an arch of evergreen, the tendrils of which lovingly clung to the names of the former pastors of the church. The basis of this arch contained the names of the eleven constituent members of the church, as a foundation on which the pastors had wrought their work. The keystone contained the words "Our Pastors," encircled with a wreath with the date "1822" above and "1872" beneath, and on the sides of the arch were the names of the fourteen previous pastors of the church, while underneath the centre of the arch was the name of the present pastor, "Snow." The effect of the whole was exceedingly neat and tasteful.

The exercises of the day were commenced in the forenoon with the annual meeting of the church for giving expression to their interest in the church and the cause of Christ in the parish. This partook of the nature of a social conference, and was deeply interesting. Among those present were the Rev. Silas Hall, the third and oldest living pastor of the church, now a resident of Abington Centre; the Rev. W. H. Dalrymple of Bradford, fourth pastor of the church; Rev. J. C. Wightman, of North Cambridge, Rev. N. J. Clark, of Philadelphia,

both former pastors; Rev. J. B. Read, of Hanson, Rev. J. Hutchinson of North Middleboro', Rev. R. B. Moody, of Plymouth, Rev. Mr. Thompson of the Congregational church, and other clergy.

The historical exercises of the afternoon were attended by a large number of the members of the church and citizens of the town. The number of elderly members of the church was specially noticeable, including two of the constituent members of the church, Deacon Jonathan R. Gurney and Deacon Robert Cook, and four of the former pastors of the church. The services were introduced with an excellent voluntary from the full church choir, after which the Rev. W. H. Dalrymple, of Bradford, read appropriate selections from Scripture and offered a fervent prayer.

The historical discourse was then delivered by the pastor. At the close of the discourse an excellent collation, provided by the members of the church, was partaken of in the vestry. The pastor presided, and with the interchange of cordial greeting, the recalling of interesting reminiscences of the past, and brief congratulatory addresses by the elder brethren present, an hour was most pleasantly spent. In the evening another meeting was held, and speeches were made by the former pastors, Dalrymple, Clark and Wightman, letters were read from absent members, hymns and psalms of the ancient time were sung, and the memorable exercises so happily terminated will form a red letter day in the history of the church.

Letters.

In response to the circular of invitation, letters were received from several persons, formerly connected with the church, who were unable to attend the Anniversary. We have only room to present the following.

BLOOMFIELD, N. J., Nov. 5, 1872.

MY DEAR BROTHER:

Your kind communication inviting me to attend your Semi Centennial meeting tomorrow, and accompanied by a notice of the same, has been received. I much regret my inability to make one of your number in that gathering, so interesting and important to many. It was, when and before I received your invitation, my purpose to avail myself of the rich privilege of being present, to meet many whose names will and must ever be cherished by me with the warmest affection, while memory holds her seat; and to hear and speak of others, no less tenderly loved who have already reached their glorious inheritance, and are awaiting the arrival of the rest of us in the same cloudless world; and also of the certain breaking forth of that sacred morning, that shall fully realize to them and us the complete triumphs and the sublime consummations of "the resurrection of the just." But I find myself obliged to relinquish that purpose. The services of the occasion cannot fail to be refreshing and highly beneficial to all who may be privileged to attend them, while they must also be deeply affecting to many. Intelligent reflection upon the various circumstances connected with the early history of this God-honored church, some of them painful, but more of them encouraging, and involving as they do events so important and solemn, will be certain to bring back and awaken many and mingled emotions. Devout thanksgivings will be raised to

God, whose blessing alone has made the church prosperous and successful. Ah! those noble, royal men and women, whose bright and heroic names rank first in the history of the church, how suited to their times, and how mighty in their work! Their personal character, how streaming with the clear, sweet light of piety, and how efficient in the deeds of philanthropy. How undimmed their heaven-inspired courage, and untiring their perseverance in making known to all within their reach "the glorious gospel of the blessed God." What new impulses of spiritual life, and what abundant supply of the Eternal Spirit attended their labors! Their early pastors, their places of worship, the people themselves —what centres of light and of holy irradiation to their community, their state, the world! The spirit of the times "which passed over them" was peculiar, but found its equal match in the unflinching self-denial and preeminent zeal of that noble galaxy of spirits. Though they are gone and we see them no longer on this side the still, dark stream, that divides this from the everlasting shore, their memories and works imperishable remain, undiminished in interest by the lapse of time or the change of circumstances; nay, will only grow and gather strength, as time rolls on, and changes pass by. From out the lives of these sun-like souls spring ever for us lessons of gratitude and confidence, of zeal and liberality.

Thank God! the freshness and power of her primal life abide in the church still. Those plenary convictions of Divine truth and that unquestioning loyalty to it in the entire compass of its enactments, without modification, change or innovation, which were the life-springs of power and efficiency with them, are the same with their successors to-day. What a legacy of wealth is thus committed to this honored Church! Into her charge and keeping, what treasure given! Heaven grant that her faith may not waver, her love grow cold, or her zeal slacken!

A gracious God has suffered me to witness the salvation of souls in different places, and to bury in the emblematic grave many of the dead with Christ; but South Abington, yes South Abington, is the very Oasis of my ministry. Who does or can forget '48 and '49? What an advent of the Spirit! What a subjugation of souls! What triumphs of faith!

May God be with you, is the prayer of one who loves both pastor and people at dear South Abington.

W. F. STUBBERT.

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CHELSEA, OCT. 29, 1872.

DEAR BROTHER:

I received a few days since your letter, and am sorry that the pressure of duties upon me is so great just at present that I shall not be able to comply with your request. The duties in connection with the new church which last Thursday we dedicated, are such as to occupy every fraction of my time.

Much should I enjoy to be with you, for there is my earliest spiritual home. It can never cease to have a place very near my heart. Though I may not be present in person, I surely shall be in spirit, and my prayer shall be, that the blessing of our common Father may descend upon and bless you.

Yours in Christ,

PRESTON GURNEY.



